

# Bicycling in Beijing

“Well, here we are in the world’s most populous country,” said Bryce as he walked into the Beijing Capital International Airport.

“Yes, almost one billion, three hundred million is a lot of people! It’s the third largest country geographically with the world’s oldest civilization as well,” said Avaron.

Bryce and Avaron had just arrived in Beijing (pronounced *bay-JIHNG*), the capital of China. Beijing is located near the east coast, in the northern half of the country. Although it is surrounded by farms, Beijing is an industrial, modern city. There are many factories and a large petroleum industry.

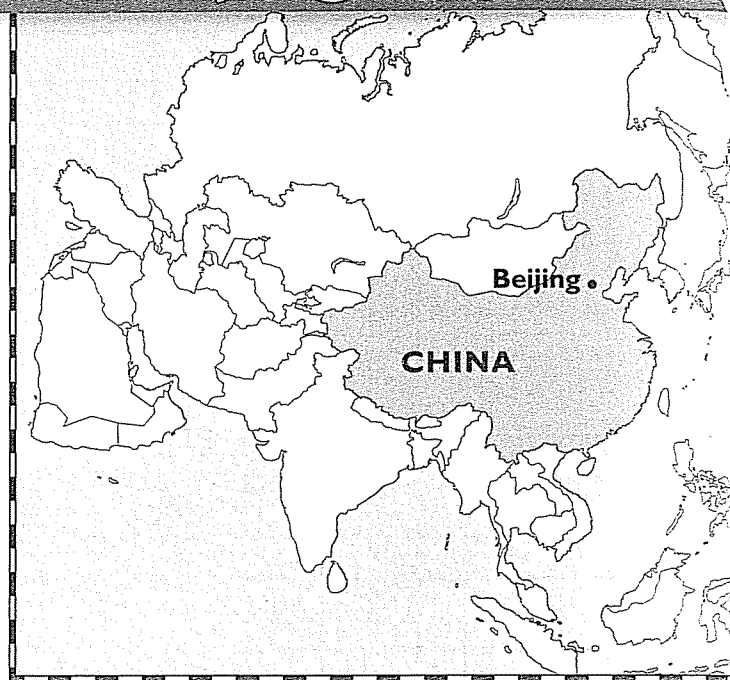
Bryce and Avaron got their passports stamped by the immigration agent, gathered their backpacks, and found the money exchange counter. They exchanged some of their American dollars for Chinese yuan, noticing that many denominations of the bills had pictures of Mao Zedong, the onetime leader of China, on the front, and various scenes from the country on the back. The kids then stepped into the steady flow of people exiting the airport.

“I can hardly wait to see the Forbidden City,” said Avaron.

Bryce’s stomach emitted a long, loud growl. “Well, I’m too hungry to go anywhere except the closest restaurant,” he said. “Let’s put our gear in our rooms at the hostel then go find some food.”

They crowded onto a bus and made their way to the hostel, a lodging residence where several people shared each room and kitchen space was provided. Bryce and Avaron put their bags on their bunk beds, and then they walked back out onto the busy streets. Bryce pointed toward an outdoor market. “That looks like a good place to find a snack,” he said.

The kids walked past the stalls, bumping into other pedestrians as they stared at the amazing variety of foods.

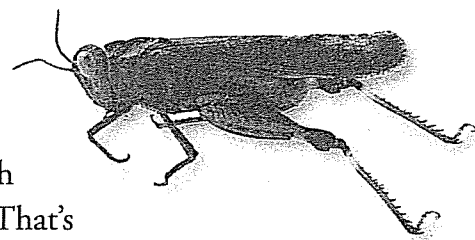


**Largest Countries in the World by Population (2004)**

Country	Population
China	1,294,629,555
India	1,065,070,607
United States	293,027,571
Indonesia	238,452,952
Brazil	184,101,109
Pakistan	153,705,278
Russia	144,112,353
Bangladesh	141,340,476
Nigeria	137,253,133

Source: World Almanac for Kids 20

One stall had hundreds of jars full of herbs. Next to it, two men surrounded by mounds of melons squatted on the sidewalk playing cards. The kids smelled noodles frying and incense burning. They saw small cages filled with live grasshoppers, all of them hopping and chirping, at least until they were added to someone's evening stir-fry.



Avaron approached a section of the walkway that was covered with shallow pans. Each pan had a different type of fish swimming in it. "That's what I call fresh seafood," she remarked.

The two approached a stall. The woman behind the counter called out "English?" Avaron smiled and said, "Yes, we speak English." The woman asked if they wanted to buy some dragon whiskers. Not able to resist such an interesting-sounding dish, Avaron said yes. The woman handed them two bowls of long, thin noodles and two pairs of chopsticks. Bryce lifted some noodles with the chopsticks, but they all slid off before he could open his mouth.

The woman laughed. "Let me show you," she said. She put noodles in a bowl for herself, and then she lifted the bowl close to her mouth. In one quick, graceful movement she lifted the noodles and slurped them loudly. "That's how we do it," she said.

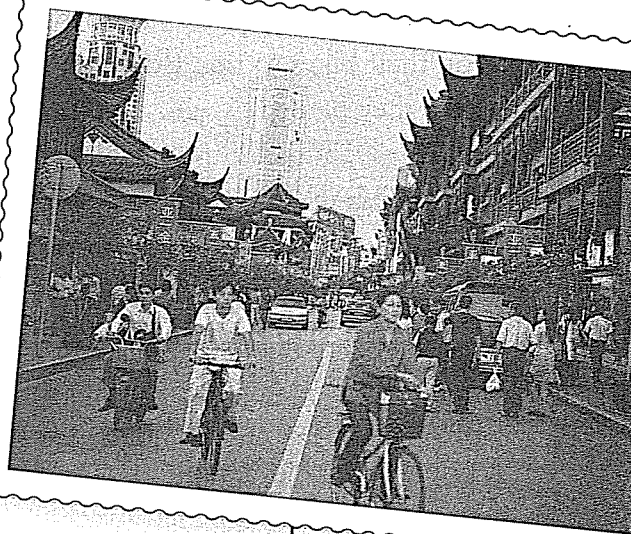
The kids managed to get a mouthful of noodles, which they ate as quietly as possible. "No, no," the woman laughed. "Like this," she said, demonstrating again, punctuating her success with a loud slurp.

Bryce looked at Avaron with his eyebrows raised. The kids tried again, and this time they both slurped. The woman said, "Yes! That is how we do it in China!" She pulled her earlobe with her thumb and index finger. Avaron recognized that this was a gesture that indicated excellence.

Smiling, the kids paid for their noodle bowls and asked how they should get around the city. They had seen taxis, buses, and a subway system. The woman explained that they could rent a rickshaw and driver, but he would only pull them short distances. Bryce giggled when he saw the two-wheeled vehicle being pulled by a man. Riding in a rickshaw looked like fun.

The woman recommended they rent bicycles. Many people ride bicycles around Beijing. The woman gave them directions to a shop close by. "Syeah-syeah nee," Avaron replied, saying "thank you" in Chinese.

Avaron and Bryce walked to the bike shop, hesitating at the crosswalk as traffic rushed past. Soon, they were riding down the street on two shiny black bicycles. They pedaled among thousands of other cyclists, arriving at Tiananmen Square, a large, paved public plaza that can hold up to one million people.



Bike riding is a popular form of transportation in Chinese cities.

Avaron reminded Bryce that commoners were forbidden to enter the city during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Forbidden City was the home of the emperors from 1368 until 1911. Now it is open to the public, and 10,000 people visit daily. With 800 buildings and 9,000 rooms, it is the largest palace complex in the world. It's so big that it has a permanent restoration crew. A complete restoration of the complex takes about ten years, and then it is time for the next restoration to begin!

The kids left their bicycles in a parking lot just for bikes. It was early in the day, and only a few dozen other bicycles were there. They bought tickets to enter the gates and toured the palace complex. They marveled at China's largest and best-preserved ancient buildings. A few hours later, they returned to the parking area. It was filled with hundreds of bicycles, and almost all of them were black.

"How are we going to find our bikes?" Avaron asked. Bryce scratched his head. They looked out on the sea of bicycles. Suddenly, Bryce remembered seeing a red bike near theirs when they had parked, so they approached every red bicycle to see if they could unlock the black bikes nearby. After a dozen frustrating tries, their keys fit in the locks of a pair of black bikes. Avaron pulled a bandanna out of her pocket and ripped it in half. She and Bryce tied the cloth strips on their bikes so that they would be easier to find each time they parked.

They wandered through Tiananmen Square, watching children fly small diamond-shaped kites with red ribbons for tails, kites shaped like birds, and other, larger kites, some six or more feet in length.

"There is no sign that anything happened here in 1989," commented Avaron.

"What happened here?" Bryce asked.

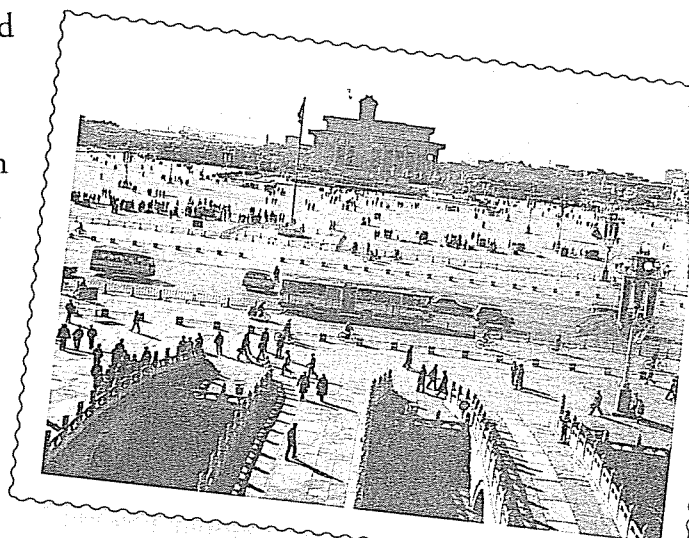
"People protested because they wanted democratic reform," explained Avaron.

"Unfortunately, the protests were ended by the military. Thousands were killed and many were injured and arrested. I thought there might be a plaque telling about the incident, but this is a monument to ancient history and the Communist revolution."

They admired a massive building called The Great Hall of the People, where the National People's Congress met. The building has numerous columns lining



Imperial  
Palace in the  
Forbidden City



Tiananmen  
Square

the front. It covers one and a half million square feet, and it can hold more than 10,000 people. The National People's Congress is the highest legislative body in China. While it is strongly influenced by the Communist Party, it is no longer powerless, as it was in the past. Its delegates serve five-year terms.

"Let's go to the Mao Mausoleum," Bryce said excitedly. This is where Mao Zedong's body is on view to the public. The Communist ruler died in 1976. His body has been on display since the mausoleum was completed in 1977. Avaron wrinkled her nose. "Why do you want to go see a dead guy?" she asked.

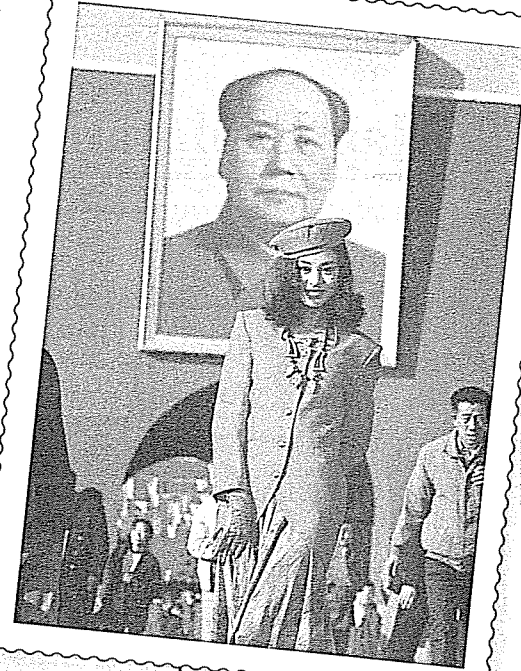
"It's an amazing cultural experience," Bryce replied. "Mao Zedong was the founding leader of the People's Republic of China. Even though millions of people died during his rule, he is still revered by many. Millions of people have filed through the tomb to view his body displayed in its crystal casket, and I want to be one of them."

Avaron agreed to go to the mausoleum. After filing past the casket along with hundreds of other visitors, she and Bryce found themselves in a gift shop inside the mausoleum. They looked at the cheap trinkets, most with pictures of Mao on them, such as pins, watches, and jewelry. "I wonder what the great Communist leader would think of this capitalistic enterprise," she mused.

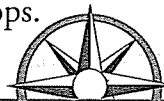
The kids returned to the bike lot and easily found their bicycles, thanks to the strips of cloth they had tied on the handlebars. They pedaled through numerous small, winding alleys, all crowded with people and traffic and shops. Vendors walked along calling out information about their services. The kids passed an outdoor dentist. His chair sat on the sidewalk, waiting for a customer. His table contained a pile of teeth to show his success with past customers. "That will inspire you to brush after every meal," Bryce muttered.

After riding back to the hostel, Bryce and Avaron took a bus to Badaling to see the Great Wall. Construction on the wall began 2,000 years ago during the Qin Dynasty as a defense against invaders. When completed, it covered almost 4,000 miles! It is the largest engineering and building project ever made by humans. "Can you imagine riding our bikes the length of the Great Wall?" Bryce asked.

He was answered by silence. He looked over his shoulder to see Avaron leaning against the wall, yawning. She smiled and said, "Right now, I can't imagine riding my bike around the block. Let's go get some rest."



A photograph of Mao Zedong hangs on the wall behind a fashion show.



**Mao Zedong**  
(also called *Mao Tse-Tung*)  
1893-1976

**M**ao Zedong helped found the Chinese Communist party. He was a revolutionary, a poet, and a writer. Mao ruled China as chairman of the People's Republic. His book *Quotations of Chairman Mao Zedong* (known as "The Little Red Book") was required reading. He is now considered a great revolutionary but not a very good leader.

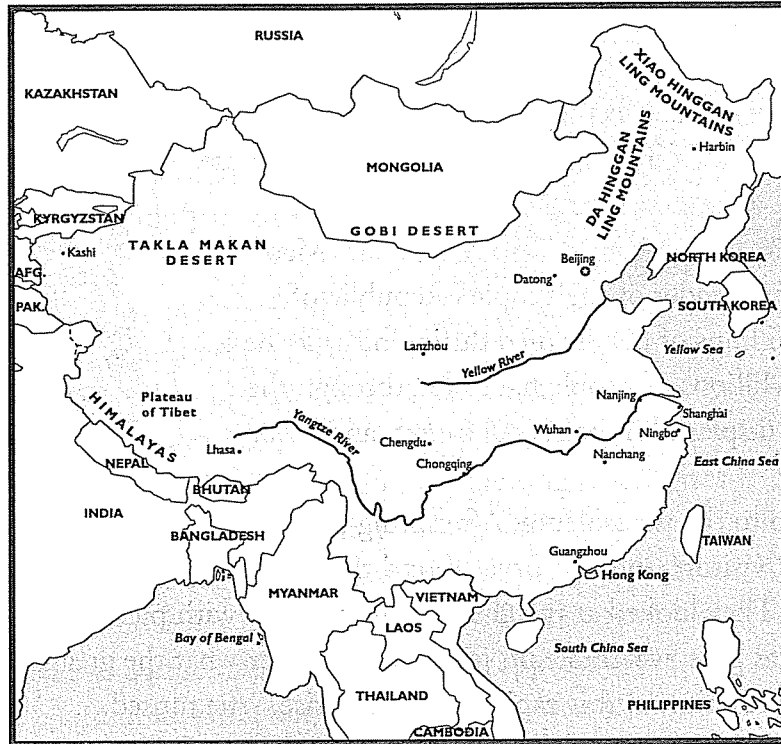




Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Map Exploration



Use the map to answer each question.

1. What major nations is China close to?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What geographic landforms served to keep China isolated from the rest of the world?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What area of China is the most heavily populated? How can you tell?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What influence might trade have had on the formation of cities in China?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Vocabulary Voyage

Use the words in the box to complete the sentences. Then use the numbered letters to complete the sentence at the bottom of the page.

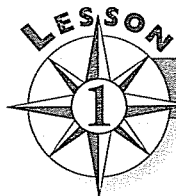
delegates  
legislative

Dynasty  
mausoleum

enterprise  
restoration

hostel  
revered

1. Students often stay in a \_\_\_\_\_ because it is  
less expensive than a hotel.  
1
2. Four people are buried in the \_\_\_\_\_  
9 10 5
3. Once the \_\_\_\_\_ is complete,  
14 2 3  
the building will be returned to its earlier good condition.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ were chosen to attend the  
4 6  
government meeting in the capital.
5. For almost three hundred years, the Ming \_\_\_\_\_ ruled  
12 11 13  
the Chinese empire.
6. A commercial \_\_\_\_\_ has a goal  
16 15  
of making money.
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ group works  
7 8  
together to make laws.
8. **Fun Fact About China:** The official \_\_\_\_\_  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
of China is \_\_\_\_\_ Chinese. There are more than  
9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16  
eight regional languages spoken.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Comprehension Expedition



**Darken the circle for the best answer.**

1. What type of government is China presently governed by?  
☐ (A) Dynasty  
☐ (B) Democratic  
☐ (C) Communist  
☐ (D) Parliamentary
  
2. In 1989, the protests in Tiananmen Square were stopped by the Chinese government. This shows that the Chinese laws do not allow for  
☐ (A) freedom of speech.  
☐ (B) freedom of the press.  
☐ (C) freedom of religion.  
☐ (D) taxation without representation.
  
3. Use a world map and the population chart in this lesson to answer the following question.  
What continent is the most populated?  
☐ (A) North America  
☐ (B) Australia  
☐ (C) Asia  
☐ (D) South America

**Use complete sentences to answer the question.**

4. What evidence in Chinese society today shows that Mao Zedong had a strong influence on Chinese culture and history?

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